



THE CENTURY OF LIFE

*The Nitishataka of Bhartrihari
freely rendered into English verse*

By
SRI AUROBINDO

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
PONDICHERRY

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THE CENTURY OF LIFE

I had at first entitled the translation "The Century of Morals," but the Sanskrit word Niti has a more complex sense. It includes also policy and worldly wisdom, the rule of successful as well as the law of ideal conduct and gives scope for observation of all the turns and forces determining the movement of human character and action.

The Shataka or 'Century' should normally comprise a hundred epigrams, but the number that has come down to us is considerably more. The excess is probably due to accretion and the mistaken ascription to Bhartrihari of verses not of his making but cast in his spirit and manner.

SRI AUROBINDO

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Invocation

To the calm Light inviolable all hail
 Whom Time divides not, nor Space measures, One,
 Boundless and Absolute who is alone,
The eternal vast I am immutable!

On Fools and Folly

LOVE'S FOLLY

She with whom all my thoughts dwell, is averse,—
She loves another. He whom she desires
Turns to a fairer face. Another worse
For me afflicted is with deeper fires.
Fie on my love and me and him and her!
Fie most on Love, this madness' minister!

THE MIDDLE SORT

Easily shalt thou the ignorant appease;
The wise more easily is satisfied;
But one who builds his raw and foolish pride
On a little lore not God himself can please.

OBSTINACY IN FOLLY

Go, with strong violence thy jewel tear
From the fierce alligator's yawning jaws;
Swim the wild surges when they lash the air
Billow on billow thundering without pause;
Or set an angry serpent in thy hair
For garland! Sooner shalt thou gain their ruth
Than conquer the fool's obstinate heart with truth.

ON THE SAME

Nay, thou wilt find sweet oil in the sea-sands,
Press them but firmly in thy strenuous hands:
The desert-born mirage shall slake thy thirst,
Or wandering through the earth thou shalt be first
To find the horns of hares, who think'st to school
With reason the prejudgments of the fool.

OBSTINACY IN VICE

Yea, wouldst thou task thy muscles then the dread
Strength of the mammoth to constrain with thread,
Canst thou the diamond's adamant heart disclose
With the sweet edge and sharpness of a rose,
With a poor drop of honey wondrously
Wilt thou make sweetness of the wide salt sea,
Who dream'st with sugared perfect words to gain
The dishonest to the ways of noble men.

FOLLY'S WISDOM

One cloak on ignorance absolutely fits;
Justly if worn, some grace is even lent;
Silence in sessions of the learned sits
On the fool's brow like a bright ornament.

A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE

When I was with a little knowledge cursed,
Like a mad elephant I stormed about
And thought myself all-knowing. But when deep-versed
Rich minds some portion of their wealth disbursed
My poverty to raise, then for a lout
And dunce I knew myself, and the insolence went
Out from me like a fever violent.

PRIDE OF LITTLENESS

The dog upon a meatless bone and lank
Horrible, stinking, vile, with spittle wet,
Feasts and with heaven's nectar gives it rank.
Then though the ambrosial God should by him stand,
He is not awed nor feels how base his fate,
But keeps his ghastly gettings more in hand.
The little nature deems its small things great
And virtue scorns and strength and noble state.

FACILIS DESCENSUS

In highest heavens the Ganges' course began;
From Shiva's loftiest brow to the white snows
She tumbles, nor on the cold summits can,
But headlong seeks the valley and the rose.
Thence downward still the heaven-born waters ran.
Say not, "Is this that Ganges? can her place
Be now so low?" Rather when man at all
From heavenly reason swerves, he sinks from grace
Swiftly. A thousand voices downward call,
A thousand doors are opened to his fall.

THE GREAT INCURABLE

For all ill things there is a cure; the fire's
 Red spleen cool water shall at once appease,
And noontide's urgent rays the sunshade tires,
 And there are spells for poison, and disease
Finds in the leech's careful drugs its ease.
The raging elephant yet feels the goad,
 And the dull ass and obstinate bullock rule
Cudgel and stick and force upon their road.
 For one sole plague no cure is found—the fool.

BODIES WITHOUT MIND

Some minds there are to Art and Beauty dead,
 Music and poetry on whose dull ear
Fall barren. Horns grace not their brutish head,
 Tails too they lack, yet is their beasthood clear.
That Heaven ordained not upon grass their feasts,
Good fortune is this for the other beasts.

THE HUMAN HERD

Whose days to neither charity nor thought
 Are given, nor holy deeds nor virtues prized,
Nor learning, such to cumber earth were brought.
 How in the human world as men disguised
This herd walk grazing, higher things unsought!

A CHOICE

Better were this, to roam in deserts wild,
On difficult mountains and by desolate pools,
A savage life with wild beasts reconciled,
Than Paradise itself mated with fools.

On Wisdom

POETS AND PRINCES

Unhonoured in a State when poets dwell
Whose fames range wider than its strong-winged birds,
Whose utterance is for grace adorable
Of chosen speech and art of noble words,
Whose wisdom hundreds come to hear and tell;
The world that nation's chief for dullness blames,
For poets without wealth are rich and kings:
When values low depreciate costly things,
'Tis the appraiser's shame and not the gem's.

TRUE WEALTH

Knowledge is truest wealth, not this which dies,—
It cherishes a strange deep peace within
Unutterably, nor the robber's eyes
Ever shall find it out; to give it is gain,
It then grows most when parted with, and poured
With sleepless hand fills gloriously its lord.
Worlds perish may, Knowledge survives their fall;
This wise men cherish; O Kings, your pride recall,
You have but wealth, they inner royalty
Of lordliest wisdom. Who with these shall vie?

THE MAN OF KNOWLEDGE

Scorn not the man of knowledge to whose eyes
The secrets of the world have been revealed!
Thou canst not hold his spirit from the skies
By fortune light nor all that earth can yield.
The furious tusker with new dark rut stained
Were sooner by a lotus-thread detained.

FATE AND WISDOM

What can the extreme wrath of hostile Fate?
The swan that floats in the cool lotus-wood
She from his pleasant mansion can exclude.
His fame remains, in food adulterate*
Who could the better choose, the worse discern.
Fate cannot touch glory that mind can earn.

THE REAL ORNAMENT

It is not armlets that adorn a man,
Nor necklaces all crammed with moonbright pearls,
Nor baths, nor ointments, nor arranged curls.
'Tis art of excellent speech that only can
Adorn him: jewels perish, garlands fade;
This only abides and glitters undecayed.

* The swan was supposed to have the power of separating milk from water when the two were mixed.

THE PRAISES OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is nobler beauty in a man
Than features : 'tis his hidden hoard of price;
This the long roll of Masters first began;
Pleasure it brings, just fame and constant bliss,
And is a helping friend in foreign lands,
And is a very god with puissant hands.
Knowledge, not wealth in great men is adored,
Nor better than a beast the mind unstored.

COMPARISONS

Men cherish burning anger in their hearts,
Yet look without to find if they have foes.
Who sweet forbearance has, requires no arts
Of speech; persuading silently he goes.

Why fear the snake when in thy kindness bask
Men evil, or a fire while kinsmen jar
Burning thy house! From heaven no medicines ask
To heal a troubled mind, where true friends are.

Nor seek for ornaments, noble modest shame
Being with thee, nor for wealth when wisdom 's by.
Who needs a kingdom when his mind can claim
A golden realm in sweetest poetry?

THE CENTURY OF LIFE

WORLDLY WISDOM

Have mercy for all men, for thy own race
Have kindness, for the cunning cunning have,
Affection for the good, and politic ways
For princes: for thy foes a spirit brave,
Patience for elders, candour for the wise:
Have skilful ways to steal out women's hearts.
Who shine here, masters in these social arts,
In them the human scheme deep-rooted lies.

GOOD COMPANY

Company of good men is a very soil
Of plenty, yielding all high things to man.
The dull weight of stupidity it can
Lift from the mind and cleanse of falsehood vile,
Sprinkling truth's fragrance sweet upon the speech;
And it can point out greatness' rising path,
And drive out sinful lust and drive out wrath,
And a calm gladness to the senses teach;
Glory that to the very stars would climb,
Can give thee, conquering thy heart and time.

THE CONQUESTS OF SOVEREIGN POETRY

Who are the conquerors? Not mere lords of land,
But kingly poets, whose high victories
Are perfect works; men's hearts at their command
Are wholly; at their will the passions rise.
Glory their body is, which Death's pale fear
Afflicts not, nor abhorred Age comes near.

RARITIES

Whatever most the soul on earth desires,
Are rarities, as, a virtuous son; a wife
Who wholly loves; Fortune that never tires;
A friend whose sweet affection waters life;
A master pleased; servants that ne'er deceive;
A charming form; a mind no sorrows grieve;
A mouth in wisdom proved that makes not strife.
These to his favourites being pleased allows
Hari, of whom the world grows amorous.

THE UNIVERSAL RELIGION

All varying Scriptures that the earth divide,
Have yet one common rule that need o'erride
Dogma nor rite, nor any creed offend;
All to their heavens by one sole path intend.
'Tis this:—Abstain from slaughter; others' wealth
To covet cease, and in thy speech no stealth
Of falsehood harbour; give in season due
According to thy power; from ribald view
Or word keep far of woman, wife or maid;
Be mild obedience to thy elders paid;
Dam longing like a river; each act beneath
Show mercy and kindness to all things that breathe.

GREAT AND MEANER SPIRITS

Some from high action through base fear refrain;
The path is difficult, the way not plain.
Others more noble to begin, are stayed
By a few failures. Great spirits undismayed
Abandon never what once to do they swore.
Baffled and beaten back, they spring once more,
Buffeted and borne down, rise up again,
And, full of wounds, come on like iron men.

THE NARROW WAY

Kind to be, yet immutably be just;
To find all baser act too hard to do,—
Yea, though not doing shatter our life to dust;—
Contempt that will not to the evil sue;
Not to the friend that's poor our need to state;
Baffled by fortune still erect to stand;
Being small to tread in footprints of the great;
Who for weak men such rugged path has planned,
Harder to tread than edge of this sharp brand?

On Pride and Heroism

LION-HEART

The manèd lion, first of kingly names,
Magnanimous and famed, though worn with age,
Wasted with hunger, blunted his keen edge
And low the splendid spirit in him flames,
Not therefore will with wretched grass assuage
His famished pangs as graze the deer and bull.
Rather his dying breath collects desire,
Leaping once more from shattered brows to pull
Of the great tuskèd elephants mad with ire
His sovereign banquet fierce and masterful.

THE WAY OF THE LION

The dog with a poor bone is satisfied,
Meatless, with bits of fat and sinew greased,
Nor is his hunger with such remnants eased.
Not so the kingly lion in his pride!
He lets the jackal go grazed by his claw
And slays the tuskèd kings. Such Nature's law;
Each being pitches his high appetite
At even with his courage and his might.

THE CENTURY OF LIFE

A CONTRAST

The dog may servile fawn upon the hand
That feeds him, with his tail at wag, nor pain
In crouching and his abject rollings bland
With upward face and belly all in vain :
The elephant to countless flatteries
Returns a quiet look in steadfast eyes.

THE WHEEL OF LIFE

The world goes round and, as returns the wheel,
All things that die must yet again be born :
His birth is birth indeed by whose return
His race and country grandeur's summits scale.

AUT CAESAR AUT NULLUS

Two fates alone strong haughty minds endure,
Of worth convinced ;—on the world's forehead proud
Singly to bloom exalted o'er the crowd,
Or wither in the wilderness obscure.

MAGNANIMITY

My brother, exalt thyself though in o'erthrow!
 Five noble planets through these spaces roll,
 Jupiter is of them;—not on these he leaps,
 Râhu,* the immortal demon of eclipse,
 In his high magnanimity of soul.

Smit with God's thunders only his head he keeps,
 Yet seizes in his brief and gloomy hour
 Of vengeance the great luminous kings of heaven,
 Day's Lord and the light to whom night's soul is given;
 He scorns to strive with things of lesser power.

THE MOTION OF GIANTS

On his wide hood as on a painted shield
 Bears up the rangèd worlds, Infinite, the Snake;
 Him in the giant midmost of his back
 The eternal Tortoise brooks, whom the great field
 Of vague and travelling waters ceaselessly
 Encompass with the proud unfathomed sea.
 O easy mights and marvellous of the great,
 Whose simplest action is yet vast with fate!

*Râhu, the Titan, stole or seized part of the nectar which rose from the world-ocean at the churning by the Gods and Titans and was appropriated by the Gods. For this violence he was smitten in two by the discus of Vishnu; but as he had drunk the nectar, he remains immortal and seeks always to revenge himself by swallowing the Sun and Moon who had detected his theft. The Tortoise mentioned in the next epigram upheld the mountain Mandar, which was the stick of the churning. The Great Snake, Ananta, was the rope of the churning, he on whose hood the earth now rests.

MAINAK

O child of the immortal mountains hoar,
Mainak,* far better had this been to bear
The bleeding wings that furious Indra tore,
The thunder's scars that with disastrous roar
Vomiting lightnings made the heavens one flare,—
Not, not this refuge in the cool wide sea
While all thy suffering people cried to thee.

NOBLE RESENTMENT

The crystal hath no sense disgrace to know,
Yet blazes angry when the sun's feet rouse;
Shall man the high-spirited, the orgulous,
Brook insult vile from fellow or from foe?

AGE AND GENIUS

Nature, not age is the high spirit's cause
That burns in mighty hearts and genius high.
Lo, on the rutting elephant's tuskèd jaws
The infant lion leaps invincibly.

*The mountains had formerly wings and could move about,—to the great inconvenience of everybody: Indra, attacked by them, smote off their wings with the thunderbolt. Mainak, son of Himalay, took refuge in the sea.

On Wealth

THE PRAYER TO MAMMON

Cast birth into the nether Hell; let all
The useless tribe of talents farther fall;
Throw virtue headlong from a rock and turn
High nobleness into the fire to burn;
The heroic heart let some swift thunder rive,
Our enemy that hinders us to live;
Wealth let us only keep; this one thing less,
All those become as weeds and emptiness.

A MIRACLE

Behold a wonder mid the sons of men!
The man is undiminished he we knew,
Unmaimed his organs and his senses keen
Even as of old, his actions nowise new,
Voice, tone and words the same we heard before,
The brain's resistless march too as of yore;
Only the flattering heat of wealth is gone,
And lo! the whole man changed, his praises done.

WEALTH THE SORCERER

He who has wealth, has birth; gold who can spill,
Is scholar, doctor, critic, what you will;
For who has golden coin, has golden tongue,
Is glorious, gracious, beautiful and young;
All virtues, talents, fames to gold repair
And lodge in gold leaving the poor man bare.

TWO KINDS OF LOSS

These things are deaths, ill-counsel ruining kings,
The son by fondling spoiled, by him the race,
Attachment, to the sage's heart that clings,
And natural goodness marred by company base,
The Brahmin by scant study unbrahminised,
Sweet shame by wine o'erthrown, by wandering long
Affection waning, friendship true unprized,
Tillage uncared, good fortune follies wrong;
But wealth in double way men may reject,
Nobly by giving, poorly by neglect.

THE TRIPLE WAY OF WEALTH

Three final roads wealth takes and only three,
To give, enjoy or lose it utterly:
And his whose miser hand to give is slow
Nor yet enjoys, the worst third way shall go.

THE BEAUTY OF GIVING

Be not a miser of thy strength and store;
Oft in a wounded grace more beauty is.
The jewel which the careful gravers score;
The sweet fair girl-wife broken with bridal bliss,
The rut-worn tusker, the autumnal stream
With its long beaches dry and slender flood;
The hero wreathed with victory's diadem,
Adorned with wounds and glorious with his blood;
The moon's last disc; rich men of their bright dross,
By gifts disburdened, fairer shine by loss.

CIRCUMSTANCE

There is no absoluteness in objects. See
This indigent man aspire as to a prize
To handfuls of mere barley-bread! yet he
A few days past, fed full with luxuries,
Held for a trifle earth and all her skies.
Not in themselves are objects great or small,
But circumstance works on the elastic mind,
To widen or contract. The view is all,
And by our inner state the world's defined.

ADVICE TO A KING

He fosters, King, the calf who milks the cow,
And thou who takest of the wide earth tax,
Foster the people; with laborious brow
And sleepless vigil strive till nought it lacks.
Then shall the earth become thy faery tree
Of plenty, pleasure, fame, felicity.

POLICY

Often she lies, wears sometimes brow of truth,
Kind sometimes, sometimes ravening-merciless;
Now open-handed, full of bounty and grace,
And now a harpy; now sweet honey and ruth
Flows from her tongue, now menace harsh or stern;
This moment with a bottomless desire
She gathers millions in, the next will tire,—
Endless expense takes prodigally its turn.
Thus like a harlot changes momentarily
In princes the chameleon Policy.

THE USES OF HIGH STANDING

Men highly placed by six good gifts are high
The first is noble liberality;
The second, power that swift obedience brings;
Service to holy men and holy things
Comes next; then fame; protection then of friends;
Pleasure in pleasant things the great list ends.
Whose rising with these six is unallied,
What seeks he by a mighty prince's side?

REMONSTRANCE WITH THE SUPPLIANT

What the Creator on thy forehead traced
As on a plate of bronze indelibly,
Expect that much or little, worst or best,
Wherever thou dwell, nobly or wretchedly,
Since thou shalt not have less, though full of pain
In deserts waterless mid savage men
Thou wander sole; nor on Olympus hoar
Ranked amid mighty Gods shalt thou have more.
Therefore be royal-hearted still and bold,
O man, nor thy proud crest in vain abase
Cringing to rich men for their gathered gold.
From the small well or ocean fathomless
The jar draws equally what it can hold.

THE RAINLARK TO THE CLOUD

You opulent clouds that in high heavens ride,
Is't fame you seek? but surely all men know
To you the darting rainlarks homage owe!
Hold you then back your showers, because your pride
By our low suings must be gratified?

TO THE RAINLARK

O rainlark, rainlark, flitting near the cloud,
Attentive hear, winged friend, a friendly word.
All vapours are not like, the heavens that shroud
Darkening; some drench the earth for noble fruit,
Some are vain thunderers wandering by with bruit:
Sue not to each thou seest then, O bird;
If humbly entreat thou must, let few have heard.

On the Wicked

EVIL NATURE

A heart unpitying, brawling vain and rude,
An eye to others' wives and wealth inclined,
Impatience of true friends and of the good,—
These things are self-born in the evil mind.

THE HUMAN COBRA

Avoid the evil man with learning crowned.
Lo, the dread cobra, all his hood a gem
Of glory, yet he crawls upon the ground.
Fear'st thou him less for that bright diadem?

VIRTUE AND SLANDER

A spiritless dull block call modesty;
Love of long fasts and holy vows must be
Mere shows, yon pure heart but a Pharisee,
The world-renouncing sage a fool; the high
World-conquering hero 's taxed with cruelty.
This sweet word's baseness, that great orator
A windbag, and the great spirit furious pride,
And calm patience an impotent weakness poor.
Thus the base-natured all high things deride.
Judged by the slanderous tongue, the uncandid eyes,
What brightest virtue turns not blackest vice?

REALITIES

Greed if thou hast, thou art of sin secure :
 Being treacherous, of what heinous fault hast need?
No distant temple wants whose soul is pure :
 Heart's truth is more than penance, vow or creed.
With natural goodness, why mere virtues pile?
 The soul being great, a royal crown were poor;
Good books thou hast, rubies were surplus vile;
 When shame has pierced the heart, can death do more?

SEVEN GRIEFS

Seven griefs are as seven daggers in my heart,—
 To see a lake without its lilled bloom,
The moon grow beggared of her radiant part,
 Sweet woman's beauty fade towards the tomb,
A noble hug his wealth, a good man gone
 Down in the press of miseries, a fair
 And vacant face when knowledge is not there,
A base man standing by a monarch's throne.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF TYRANTS

Tyrants have neither kin nor lover. Fire
 Accepts the rich man's offerings; at the end
Shall these then slake its wrathful swift desire?
 Nay, let him touch it! It will spare its friend!

THE HARD LOT OF THE COURTIER

Hard is the courtier's lot who fain would please.

Being silent, "Lo the dumb man!" they gibe; if speech

Eloquent edge his wit, "He seeks to teach,

The chatterer!" else, "Hark to his flatteries!"

Rude, if he sit near; far,—"What want of ease!"

Enduring insult, "Coward!"; if he spurn

The injurer, "Surely a spawn of parents base!"

Such service is in courts, whose laws to learn
Wise sages are perplexed, or tread its ways.

THE UPSTART

Yea, how this high sun burns that was so low,

Enlightening with his favours all things base!

Hating all goods, with chainless license vile

Of those his filthy deeds makes arrogant show

Obscurely engendered in his unseen days

Ere sudden fortune raised from miry soil.

No virtue now, genius nor merit's safe

From vulture eyes that at all cleanness chafe.

TWO KINDS OF FRIENDSHIP

Like shadows of the afternoon and morn
 Friendship in good men is and in the base;
 All vast the lewd man's in its first embrace,
But lessens and wears away; the other's, born
A dwarfish thing, grows giant-like apace.

NATURAL ENMITIES

Trust not thy innocence, nor say, "No foe
 I have the world through;" other is the world.
The deer 's content with simple grass, yet bow
 Of hunter fears; the fisher's net is hurled
To catch the water's innocents; his high
 And simple life contented leads the good,
Yet by the evil heart insatiably
 With causeless hatred finds himself pursued.

On Virtue

DESCRIPTION OF THE VIRTUOUS

Homage to him who keeps his heart a book
For stainless matters, prone great talk to prize
And nearness of the good; whose faithful look
Rejoices in his own dear wife, whose eyes
Are humble to the Master good and wise;

A passion high for learning, noble fear
Of public shame who feels; treasures the still
Sweet love of God; to self no minister,
But schools that ravener to his lordlier will,
Far from the evil herd on virtue's hill.

THE NOBLE NATURE

Eloquence in the assembly; in the field
The puissant arm, the lion's heart; proud looks
Unshaken in defeat; but modest-kind
Mercy when victory crowns; passionate for books
High love of learning, thoughts to fame inclined;—
These things are natural to the noble mind.

THE HIGH AND DIFFICULT ROAD

To give in secret as beneath a shroud;
 To honour all who to thy threshold come;·
 Do good by stealth and of thy deeds be dumb,
But of another's noble acts be proud
And vaunt them in the senate and the crowd;
To keep low minds in fortune's arrogant day;
 To speak of foemen without scorn or rage;
What finger appointed first this roughest way
 Of virtue narrower than the falchion's edge?

ADORNMENT

The hand needs not a bracelet for its pride,
 High liberality its greatness is;
The head no crown wants to show deified;
 Fallen at the Master's feet it best doth please.
Truth-speaking makes the face more bright to shine,
 Deep study girds the brow with diamond rays;
Strength and not gold in conquering arms divine
 Triumphs; calm purity the heart arrays.
Nature's great men have these for wealth and gem;
Riches they need not, nor a diadem.

THE SOFTNESS AND HARDNESS OF THE NOBLE

Being fortunate, how the noble heart grows soft
 As lilies! but in calamity's rude shocks
 Rugged and high like a wild mountain's rocks
It fronts the thunders, granite piled aloft.

THE POWER OF COMPANY

Behold the water's way,—on iron red
 When it falls hissing, not a trace remains,
 Yet 'tis the same that on the lotus shines,
A dewy thing like pearls,—yea, pearl indeed
 Turns when the oyster-shell receives and heaven
 To those rain-bringing stars their hour has given.
High virtue, vice or inconspicuous mean
'Tis company that moulds in things or men.

THE THREE BLESSINGS

He is a son whose noble deeds and high
 His loving father's heart rejoice;
She is a wife whose only jewellery
 Is her dear husband's joy and bliss;
He the true friend whose actions are the same
In peaceful days or hours of bale and shame;
 These three who wins, finds earth his Paradise.

THE WAYS OF THE GOOD

Who would not honour good men and revere
Whose loftiness by modesty is shown,
Whose merits not by their own vaunts appear,
Best in their constant praise of others known,
And for another's good each power to brace
To passionate effort is their selfishness.

Hark to their garrulous slanderer's gurge of blame
Foaming with censure violent and rude!
Yet they revile not back, but put to shame
By their sweet patience and calm fortitude.
Such are their marvellous moods, their noble ways,
Whom men delight to honour and to praise.

WEALTH OF KINDNESS

'Tis more than earrings when the ear inclines
To wisdom; giving bracelets rich exceeds.
So the beneficent heart's deep-storèd mines
Are worked for ore of sweet compassionate deeds,
And with that gold the very body shines.

THE GOOD FRIEND

Thus is the good friend pictured by the pens
Of good men:—still with gentle hand he turns
From sin and shame his friend, to noble gains
Still spurs him on; deep in his heart inurns
His secret errors, blares his parts abroad,
Gives at his need, nor takes the traitor's road
Leaving with facile wings when fortune spurns.

THE NATURE OF BENEFICENCE

Freely the sun gives all his beams to wake
The lotus slumbering in the darkened lake;
The moon unasked expends her gentle light,
Wooing to bloom her lily of the night;
Unasked the cloud its watery burden gives.
The noble nature in beneficence lives;
Unsought, unsued, not asking kindness back
Does good in secret for that good's sole sake.

THE ABOMINATION OF WICKEDNESS

Rare are the hearts that for another's joy
Fling from them self and hope of their own bliss;
Himself unhurt for other's good to try
Man's impulse and his common nature is:
But they who for their poor and selfish aims
Hurt others, are but fiends with human names.
Who hurt their brother-men, themselves unhelped,
What they are we know not, nor what horror whelped.

WATER AND MILK

By water and sweet milk example Love.
Milk all its sweetness to the water gives,
For in one wedded self their friendship lives;
And when hot pangs the one to anguish move,
The other immolates itself to fire.
To steal his friend's grief is a friend's desire.
He seeing his friend's hard state is minded too
To seek the flame; but happily again
Wedded to him is eased of all his pain.
This friendship is, one heart that's shared by two.

ALTRUISM OCEANIC

Here Vishnu sleeps, there find his foes their rest;
The hills have taken refuge; serried lie
Their armies in deep Ocean's sheltering breast;
The clouds of doom are of his heart possessed,
He harbours nether fire whence he must die.
Cherisher of all in vast equality,
Lo, the wide strong sublime and patient sea!

THE ARYAN ETHIC

Hear the whole Gospel and the Law thereto:—
Speak truth, and in wise company abide;
Slay lust, thine enemy; abandon pride;
Patience and sweet forgiveness to thee woo;
Set not in sin thy pleasure, but in God;
Follow the path high feet before thee trod;

Give honour to the honourable; conceal
Thy virtues with a pudent veil of shame,
Yet cherish to the end a stainless fame;
Speak sweetness to thy haters and their weal
Pursue; show pity to unhappy men,
Lift up the fallen, heal the sufferer's pain.

THE ALTRUIST

How rare is he who for his fellows cares!
His mind, speech, body all are as pure jars
Full of his soul's sweet nectar; so he goes
Filling the world with rows on shining rows
Of selfless actions ranked like the great stars.

He loves man so that he in others' hearts
Finding an atom even of noble parts
Builds it into a mountain and thereon
His soul grows radiant like a flower full-blown;
Others are praised, *his* mind with pleasure starts.

MOUNTAIN MOLOY

Legends of golden hills the fancy please,
But though they were real silver and solid gold,
Yet are the trees they foster only trees.
Moloy shall have my vote with whom, 'tis told,
Harbouring the linden, pine and basest thorn
Ennobled turn to scent and earth adorn.

On Firmness

GODS

Cease never from the work thou hast begun
Till thou accomplish. Such the great Gods be,
Nor paused for gems unknown beneath the Sun,
Nor feared for the huge poisons of the sea,
Then only ceased when nectar's self was won.

THE MAN OF HIGH ACTION

Happiness is nothing, sorrow nothing. He
Recks not of these whom his clear thoughts impel
To action, whether little and miserably
He fare on roots or softly dine and well,
Whether bare ground receive his sleep or bed
With smoothest pillows ease his pensive head,
Whether in rags or heavenly robes he dwell.

ORNAMENTS

What is an ornament? Courtesy in high place,
Speech temperate in the hero, innocence
In high philosophers, and wrathlessness
In hermits, and in riches noble expense.
Sincerity and honest meaning plain
Save outward holiness, mercy the strong
Adorns and modesty most learned men;
One grace to every station can belong.
Cause of all other gems, of all is blent
Virtue, the universal ornament.

THE IMMUTABLE COURAGE

If men praise thee, O man, 'tis well; nor ill,
If they condemn. Let fortune curst or boon
Enter thy doors or leave them as she will;
Though death expect thee ere yon sinking moon
Vanish or wait till unborn stars give light,
The firm high soul remains immutable
Nor by one step will deviate from the right.

THE BALL

Lo, as a ball that, by the player's palm
Smit downward, falls but to again rebound,
So the high virtuous man hurled to the ground
Bends not to fortune long his spirit calm.

WORK AND IDLENESS

Their bitterest enemy in their bodies pent
Men cherish, idleness. Be in thy breast
The tireless gust of work thy mighty guest,
Man's ceaseless helper, whose great aid once lent
Thy strength shall fail not, nor thy head be bent.

THE SELF-RELIANCE OF THE WISE

The tree once pruned shall seek again the skies,
The moon in heaven waning wax once more:
Wise men grieve not nor vex their soul with sighs
Though the world tread them down with savage roar;
Knowing their strength, they husband it to rise.

On Fate

FATE MASTERS THE GODS

Brihuspathy* his path of vantage shows,
The red disastrous thunder leaves his hand
Obedient, the high Gods in burning rows
His battled armies make, high heaven's his fort,
Iravath swings his huge trunk for his sport,
The Almighty's guardian favours over him stand;—
That Indra with these strengths, this lordship proud
Is broken by his foes in battle loud.
Come then, bow down to Fate. Alas, the vain
Heroisms, virtues, toils of glorious man!

A PARABLE OF FATE

A serpent in a basket crushed despaired,
His organs all with hunger weak and worn,
While patiently at night the mouse prepared
A hole in that self basket. Ere the morn
By his own industry, such Nature's law,
The patient labourer fills the serpent's maw.
He with that food replenished, by the way
The mouse had made escaped. O world, behold
The mighty master of thy sad decay
And fortunate rising, Fate, the godhead old.

* Brihuspathy is counsellor to Indra, the King of Heaven, and spiritual guide of the Gods. Iravath is Indra's elephant.

FATE AND FREEWILL

“The actions of our former life control
This life’s sweet fruit or bitter; even the high
Intellect follows where these point its eye.”
All this is true,—O yet, be wise of soul,
Think ere thou act, thou who wouldst reach the goal.

ILL LUCK

A bald man, goes the story, when the noon
Beat his plagued brows into a fiery swoon,
Desiring dimness and cool place was led
By subtle Fate into a high palm’s shade.
There where he shelter hoped, a giant fruit
Crashed on his pate and broke with horrid bruit.
Wherever the unfortunate hides his head,
Grief and disaster in his footprints tread.

FATE MASTERS ALL

I saw the brilliant moon eclipsed, the sun
Baulked darkly of his radiant pilgrimage,
And halter-bound the forest’s mighty one,
The iron-coiled huge python in a cage;
Then saw the wise skilled brain a pauper, and said
“Fate only is strong whose hand on all is laid.”

THE FOLLIES OF FATE

Sometimes the gods build up a very man
 Whom genius, virtue, glory crowd to bless,
 And Earth with him adorned grows measureless.
Then if death early spoil that noble plan,
Ah, blind stupidity of Fate that throws
From her brow the jewel, from her breast the rose!

THE SCRIPT OF FATE

When on the desert-bramble's boughs you find
 Leafage nor flower, blame not the bounteous Spring!
Is it the sun's fault if the owlet blind
 Sees not by day so radiant-bright a thing?
Though down the rainlark's throat no sweet drops flow,
 Yet for his falling showers the high cloud praise.
What Fate has written in power upon the brow,
 Where is the hand so mighty it shall raise?

On Karma*

ACTION BE MAN'S GOD

Whom shall men worship? The high Gods? But they
Suffer fate's masteries, enjoy and rue.
Whom shall men worship? Fate's stern godhead? Nay,
Fate is no godhead. Many fruits or few
Their actions bring to men,—that settled price
She but deals out, a steward dumb, precise.
Let action be man's God, o'er whom even Fate
Can rule not, nor his puissance abrogate.

THE MIGHT OF WORKS

Bow ye to Karma who with puissant hand
Like a vast potter all the universe planned,
Shut the Creator in and bade him work
In the dim-glinting womb and luminous murk;
By whom impelled high Vishnu hurled to earth
Travels his tenfold depths and whorls of birth;
Who leading mighty Rudra by the hand
Compels to wander strange from land to land,—
A vagrant begging with a skull for bowl
And suppliant palms, who is yet the world's high Soul.
Lo, through the skies for ever this great Sun
Wheels circling round and round by Karma spun.

* There is a distinction, not always strictly observed, between Fate and Karma. Karma is the principle of Action in the universe with its stream of cause and infallible effect, and for man the sum of his past actions whose results reveal themselves not at once, but in the dispensation of Time, partly in this life, mostly in lives to come. Fate seems a more mysterious power imposing itself on men, despite all their will and endeavour, from outside them and above—*daivam*, a power from the Gods.

KARMA

It is not beauty's charm nor lineage high,
It is not virtue, wisdom, industry,
Service, nor careful arduous toil that can
Bring forth the fruits of his desire to man;
Old merit mind's strong asceticism had stored
Returns to him with blessing or a sword,
His own past deeds that flower soon or late
Each in its season on the tree of Fate.

PROTECTION FROM BEHIND THE VEIL

Safe is the man good deeds forgotten claim,
In pathless deserts or in dangerous war
Or by armed foes enringed; sea and fierce flame
May threaten, death's door waiting swing ajar;
Slumbering or careless though his foemen find,
Yea, though they seize him, though they smite or bind,
On ocean wild or on the cliff's edge sheer
His deeds walk by his side and guard from fear;
Through death and birth they bore him and are here.

THE STRENGTH OF SIMPLE GOODNESS

Toiler ascetic, who with passionate breath
 Swellest huge holinesses,—vain thy faith!
 Good act adore, the simple goddess plain,
 Who gives the fruit thou seekest with such pain.
 Her touch can turn the lewd man into a saint,
 Inimitably her quiet magic lent
 Change fools to sages and hidden mysteries show
 Beyond eye's reach or brain's attempt to know,
 Fierce enemies become friends and poisons ill
 Transform in a moment to nectar at her will.

FORESIGHT AND VIOLENCE

Good be the act or faulty, its result
 The wise man painfully forecasting first
 Then does; who in mere heedless force exult,
 Passionate and violent, taste a fruit accursed.
 The Fury keeps till death her baleful course
 And blights their life, tormenting with remorse.

MISUSE OF LIFE

This noble earth, this place for glorious deeds
 The ill-starred man who reaching nowise heeds,
 Nor turns his soul to energy austere,
 With little things content or idlesse drear,—
 He is like one who gets an emerald pot
 To bake him oil-cakes on a fire made hot
 With scented woods, or who with golden share
 For sorry birthwort ploughs a fertile fair
 Sweet soil, or cuts rich camphor piece by piece
 To make a hedge for fennel. Not for this
 In the high human form he walks great earth
 After much labour getting goodliest birth.

FIXED FATE

Dive if thou wilt into the huge deep sea,
The inaccessible far mountains climb,
Vanquish thy foes in battle fiercely,
All arts and every science, prose and rhyme,
Tillage and trade in one mind bring to dwell,—
Yea, rise to highest effort, ways invent
And like a bird the skies immeasurable
Voyage; all this thou mayst, but not compel
What was not to be, nor what was prevent.

FLOWERS FROM A HIDDEN ROOT

With store of noble deeds who here arrives,
Finds on this earth his well-earned Paradise.
The lonely forest grows his kingly town
Of splendour, every man has friendly eyes
Seeing him, or the wide earth for his crown
Is mined with gems and with rich plenty thrives.
This high fate is his meed of former lives.

Miscellaneous Verses

DEFINITIONS

What is clear profit? Meeting with good men.

A malady? Of incompetent minds the spell.

What is a loss? Occasion given in vain.

True skill of life? With heavenward thoughts to dwell.

A hero? The heart that is o'er passion lord.

A mistress? She to loving service sworn.

Best wealth? Wisdom. True happiness? The sward

Of one's own country, life where it was born.

A kingdom? Swift obedience fruitful found

At the low word from hearts of all around.

A RARITY

Rich in sweet loving words, in harshness poor,

From blame of others' lives averse, content

With one dear wife and so heart-opulent,

Candid and kindly, like an open door,

Some here and there are found on teeming earth;

Her fairest ornament is their quiet worth.

THE FLAME OF THE SOUL

Insulted, wronged, oppressed the unshaken mind,

Treasuring its strength, insurgent its high will,

Towers always, though beat fiercely down to hell.

The torch is to the inglorious soil declined,

Its flame burns upward and unconquered still.

THE CONQUEROR

That man whose soul bright beauty cannot pierce
 With love's sweet burning javelins from her eyes,
Nor sorrow torture his heart, nor passions fierce
 Miserably over his senses tyrannize,
Conquers the world by his high-scated will,
The man well-balanced, noble, wise and still.

THE HERO'S TOUCH

Touched by one hero's tread how vibrating
 Earth starts as if sun-visited, ablaze,
 Vast, wonderful, young! Man's colourless petty days
Bloom suddenly and seem a grandiose thing.

THE POWER OF GOODNESS

The bloom of natural goodness like a flower
 Is Nature's darling, all her creatures prize,
And on whose body's stock its fragrant power
 Blossoms, all fiercest things can humanise.
For him red fire becomes like water pale and cool,
For him heaven-threatening Ocean sinks into a pool
Of quiet azure; for him the lion's heart
 Tames its dire hungers to be like the hind's,
And the fell snake unsoothed by music's art
 Upon his brows in floral wreaths he binds.
Poisons for him to nectar change; impassable hills
Droop, gentle slopes; strong blessings grow from ruthless ills.

TRUTH

Dear as his own sweet mother to the man
Of truth his word is, dear as his heart's blood.
Truth, 'tis the mother of his soul's great brood,
High modesty and virtue's lordly clan.
Exceeding pure of heart as to a youth
His mother, and like a mother to him cleaves
This sweet proud goddess. Rather life he leaves
And happiness puts away, not divine Truth.
Others clasp some dear vice, gold, woman, wine;
He keeps for Truth his passion fiery and fine.

WOMAN'S HEART

More hard the heart of woman is to seize
Than an unreal mirrored face, more hard
Her moods to follow than on mountains barred
With rocks that skirt a dreadful precipice
A dangerous luring pathway near the skies.

And transient is her frail exacting love
Like dew that on some lotus' petal lies.
As with rich fatal shoots an upas-grove,
Woman with faults is born, with faults she grows.
Thorns are her nature, but her face the rose.

FAME'S SUFFICIENCY

“Victory is his on earth or Paradise,
The high heart slain in battle face to face.”
Let be your empire and your golden skies;
For him enough that friends and foemen praise
And with fame's rumour in his ears he dies.

MAGNANIMITY

The world teems miracles, breeds grandest things,
But Râhu of all most marvellous and great
Or the vast Boar on white tusks delicate
Like buds who bears up earth, else chaos rings.
Râhu, cleft, trunkless, deathless, passionate,
Leaps on his foemen and can overbear,
A miracle, then, greater miracle, spare.

MAN INFINITE

Earth is hemmed in with Ocean's vaster moan;
The world of waters flows not infinitely;
A high unwearied traveller, the Sun
Maps out the limits of the vaulted sky.
On every creature born a seal is set
With limits budded in, kept separate.
Only man's soul looks out with luminous eyes
Upon the worlds illimitably wise.

THE PROUD SOUL'S CHOICE

But one God to worship, hermit Shiv or puissant Vishnu high;
But one friend to clasp, the first of men or proud Philosophy;
But one home to live in, Earth's imperial city or the wild;
But one wife to kiss, Earth's sweetest face or Nature, God's own
child.
Either in your world the mightiest or my desert solitary.

THE WAVERER

Seven mountains, eight proud elephants, the Snake,
The Tortoise help to bear this Earth on high,
Yet is she troubled, yet her members shake!
Symbol of minds impure, perplexed and wry.
Though constant be the strife and claim, the goal
Escapes the sin-driven and the doubting soul.

GASTER ANAIDES

Nay, is there any in this world who soon
Comes not to heel, his mouth being filled with food?
The inanimate tabour, lo, with flour well-glued
Begins with sweeter voice its song to croon.

THE RARITY OF THE ALTRUIST

Low minds enough there are who only care
 To fill their lusts with pleasure, maws with food.
Where shall we find him, the high soul and rare
 To whom the good of others is his good?
First of the saints is he, first of the wise.

The Red Mare of the Ocean drinks the seas
 Her own insatiable fire to feed;
 The cloud for greater ends exacts his need,
The parching heats to cool, Earth's pain to ease.
Wealth's sole good is to heal the unhappy's sighs.

STATESMAN AND POET

How like are these whose labour does not cease,
 Statesman and poet, in their several cares;
Anxious their task, no work of splendid ease!
 One ranges far for costly words, prepares
Pure forms and violence popular disdains,
 The voice of rare assemblies strives to find,
Slowly adds phrase to noble phrase and means
 Each line around the human heart to wind.
The statesman seeks the nation's wealth from far;
 Not to the easy way of violence prone
He puts from him the brutal clang of war
 And seeks a better kind dominion,
To please the just in their assemblies high,
 Slowly to build his careful steps between
A noble line of linkèd policy,—
 He shapes his acts a nation's heart to win.
 Their burden and their toil make these two kin.

THE WORDS OF THE WISE

Serve thou the wise and good, covet their speech
Although to trivial daily things it keeps.
Their casual thoughts are foam from solemn deeps;
Their passing words make Scripture, Science; rich,
Though seeming poor, their common actions teach.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

If some day by some chance God thought this good
And lilies were abolished from the earth,
Would yet the swan like fowls of baser birth
Scatter a stinking dunghill for his food?

THE ROOTS OF ENJOYMENT

That at thy door proud-necked the high-foaming steeds
Prance spirited and stamp in pride the ground
And the huge elephants stand, their temple's bound
Broken with rut, like slumbrous mountains round,—
That in harmonious concert fluted reeds,
The harp's sweet moan, the tabour and the drum
And conch-shell in their married moments come
Waking at dawn in thy imperial dome,—
Thy pride, thy riches, thy full-sated needs,
That like a king of gods thou dwell'st on earth,—
From duties high-fulfilled these joys had birth;
All pleasant things washes to men of worth
The accumulated surge of righteous deeds.

NATURAL QUALITIES

Three things are faithful to their place decreed,—
Its splendour as of blood in the lotus red,
Kind actions, of the noble nature part,
And in bad men a cold and cruel heart.

DEATH, NOT VILENESS

Better to a dire verge by fœmen borne,
O man, thy perishable body dashed
Upon some ragged beach by Ocean lashed,
Hurled on the rocks with bleeding limbs and torn;

Better thy hand on the dire cobra's tooth
Sharp-venomed or to anguish in the fire,
Not at the baser bidding of desire
Thy heart's high virtue lost and natural truth.

MAN'S WILL

Renounce thy vain attempt, presumptuous man,
Who think'st and labourest long impossibly
That the great heart for misery falter can:
Fruitless thy hope that cruel fall to see.
Dull soul! these are not petty transient hills,
Himâlay and Mahendra and the rest,
Nor your poor oceans, their fixed course and wills
That yield by the last cataclysm oppressed.
Man's will his shattered world can long survive:
When all has perished, it can dare to live.

THE SPLENDID HARLOT

Victory's a harlot full of glorious lust
Who seeks the hero's breast with wounds deep-scored,
Hate's passionate dints like love's! So when the sword
Has ploughed its field, leap there she feels she must.

FATE

Lo, the moon who gives to healing herbs their virtue, nectar's
home,
Food immortalising,—every wise physician's radiant Som,*
Even him consumption seizes in its cruel clinging arms.
Then be ready! Fate takes all her toll and heeds not gifts nor
charms.

THE TRANSIENCE OF WORLDLY REWARDS

Your gleaming palaces of brilliant stone,
Your bright-limbed girls for grace and passion made,
Your visible glory of dominion,
Your sceptre and wide canopy displayed,
These things you hold, but with what labour won
Weaving with arduous toil a transient thread
Of shining deeds on careful virtue spun!
Which easily broken, all at once is sped;
As when in lover's amorous war undone
A pearl-string, on all sides the bright pearls shed
Collapse and vanish from the unremembering sun.

* Soma, the moon-god of the immortalising nectar, the Vedic Soma-wine.